

Following the recognition of his achievements at the Irish World Awards ceremony last Monday night, **JOHN COLLINS** catches up with his former manager Denis McCarthy, to take a look back at the fifty years he has spent living and breathing Gaelic football in London.

FROM TIME TO TIME as a sports reporter you will be given assignments that could be best described as less than

inspiring, for example a wet November afternoon in Tir Chonaill Park, watching a Division 2 play-off between

two teams who haven't trained in two months.

Then there are the other tasks that you are asked to carry out that you really look forward to and hope that you can do some sort of justice to. I would class interviewing St Clarets' founder and Irish World Lifetime Achievement Award winner Denis McCarthy as one such topic.

Allow me if you would, to get a little personal to start with, just to fill you in on some of the background. Denis was easily the single most influential figure on my own football career when I first came to England at the age of sixteen. I joined the St Clarets and was immediately given the opportunity to play on their intermediate team. Stemming from my association with him, I have been fortunate enough to have travelled to America with the London minor team in 1987, appear (albeit on the subs bench) in an All-Ireland Junior

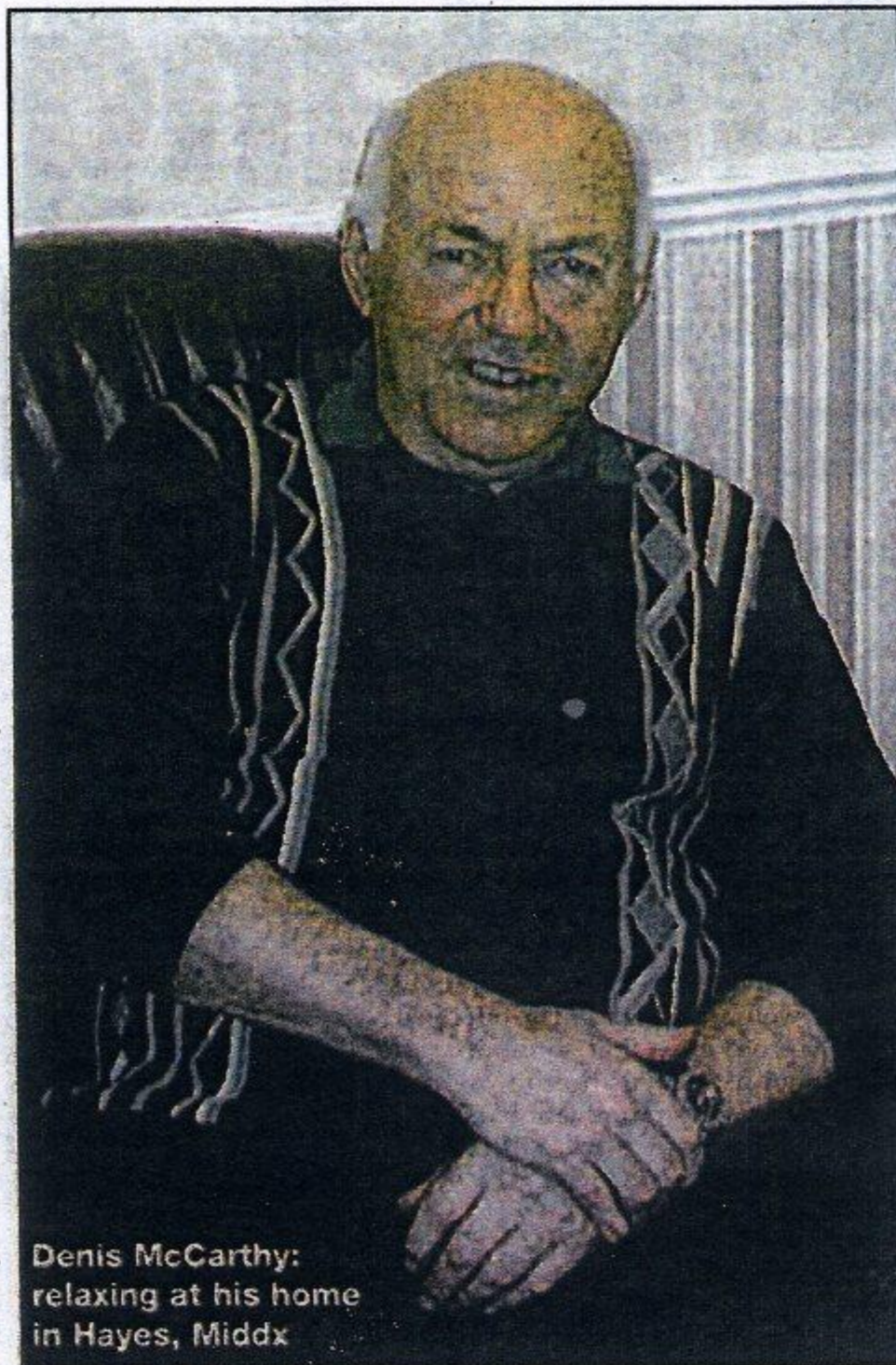
Final in Croke Park and also win an Intermediate Championship in 1989.

When I decided to leave St Clarets for St Brendan's after six years with the club, Denis was the first to shake my hand and wish me all the best. Further to that, the very first article I wrote for the Irish World was composed while sitting in my car outside Denis' house in Hayes, (don't ask...it's a long story...but I will never forget you Mr Burke!).

So when the chance came to pay back a little of the debt I feel I owe to Denis, I was only too glad to take the opportunity, for me it was the perfect assignment.

Born in County Kerry, Denis and the rest of his family headed north when he was eleven to settle in Dunlavin, Co Wicklow, where his father worked in the forestry.

A gifted footballer from an early age, Denis has the distinc-



Denis McCarthy: relaxing at his home in Hayes, Middx

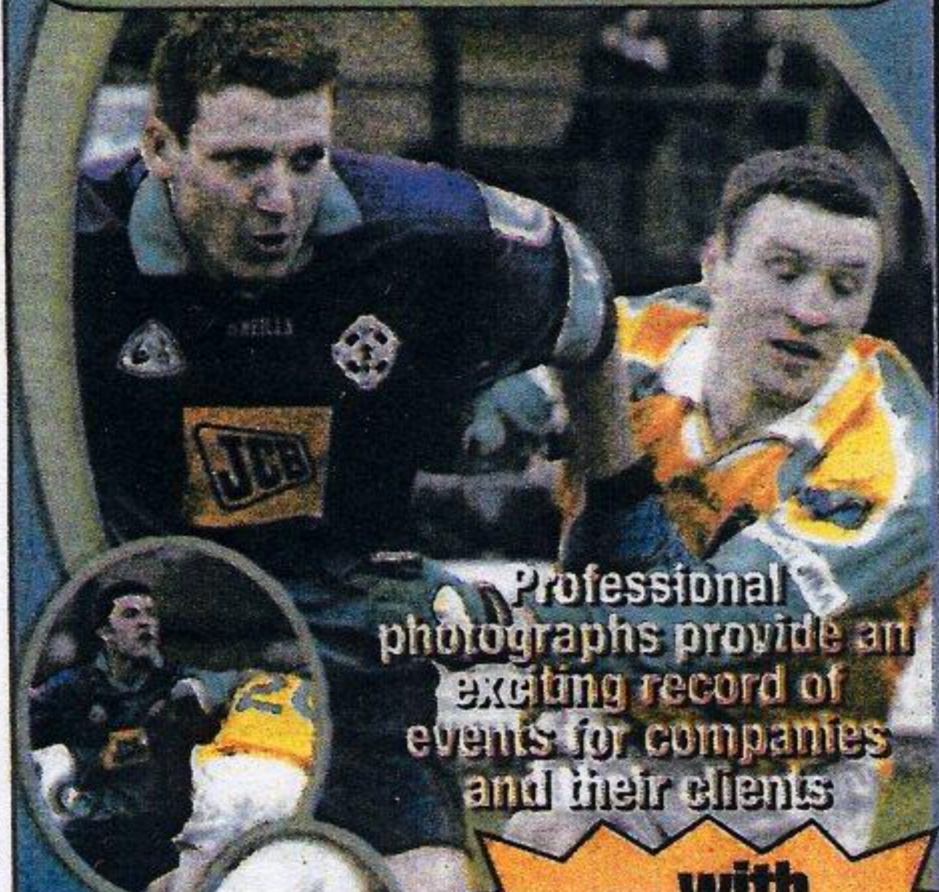
tion of playing in the very first televised match recorded in Ireland, when the Wicklow U-16 final between Dunlavin and Newtown was recorded and shown in cinemas around the country later that week.

From that performance, he

progressed onto the Wicklow minor team, for whom he played for two years, before heading to Dublin to seek fame and fortune and hopefully a job in the Guinness Brewery at St James' Gate.

After a two-year wait in the

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Denis McCarthy, extreme right, back row, with the St Clarets team that won the 1989 Intermediate Championship

